

## **Dead Before Morning**

No 1 Rafferty & Llewellyn British Cozy Mystery Detective Series

**Geraldine Evans**

**Email Sign-Up Link for New Releases and Bargain Book Buys. Please copy and paste the link into your address bar: [Just Click Here](#)**

**Dead Before Morning**

**Geraldine Evans**

**Copyright Geraldine Evans 1993**

Discover other books by Geraldine Evans at [Geraldine Evans's Website](#)

**License Note: This ebook is licensed for your personal enjoyment only. This ebook may not be re-sold or given away to other people. If you would like to share this book with another person, please purchase an additional copy for each recipient. Thank you for respecting the hard work of this author.**

**Publisher's Note: This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons living or dead, is entirely coincidental.**

**Cover Design by Selfpubbookcovers.com/JohnBellArt**

The Moral Rights of the author have been asserted.

**All Rights Reserved**

## **LANGUAGE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN BRITISH AND AMERICAN ENGLISH**

### **BRITISH SLANG MEANING**

**Porkie pie (Cockney rhyming slang): Lie**

**Trouble and strife (Cockney rhyming slang): Wife**

**Put the frighteners on: Threaten**

**Cup of Rosie Lee (Cockney rhyming slang): Tea**

**Cup of builder's: Strong tea**

**Builder's bum: Bottom cleavage**

**Grotty: Horrible**

**Sticky situation: Difficult**

**Short and curlies: Pubic hair**

**Come clean: Tell the truth**

**Old lags: Prison inmates**

**Autumn: Fall**

**Grey: Gray**

**Snowed under: Very busy**

**Moolah: Money**

**Have it out: Brisk exchange of views**

**Do a (moonlight) flit: Disappear suspiciously suddenly**

**Done a bunk: Ditto**

**Turn a girl's head: Make her smitten/keen on someone**

**Cracking up: Having a nervous breakdown**

**'You make me crack up': 'You make me laugh'**

**On someone's watch: While responsible for**

**Divvy up: Share out**

**Snout: Police informer**

**Grass up: Inform on someone to the police**

**By-blow: Illegitimate child**

**Born the wrong side of the blanket: Ditto**

**Bright spark: Clever person**

**Scumbag: Low-life male character**

**In a jiffy: Quickly**

**Jiffy bag: Padded envelope**

### **BRITISH SPELLING US SPELLING**

**Neighbour: Neighbor**

**Labour: Labor**

**Practise (as in to practise doing something): Practice**

**Practice ( Doctor's Practice): Practice**

**Recognise: Recognize**

**Realise: Realize**

**Organise: Organize**

**There are plenty of other differences, but, enough already!**

## CHAPTER ONE

'Is it yourself?'

Detective Inspector Joseph Aloysius Rafferty winced as his mother's voice threatened to pierce his eardrum and, although briefly tempted to plead not guilty, he had perforce to agree that yes, it *was* himself. Surely, he demanded of his reflection in the hall mirror, a hangover, a murder and his mother all in one morning were more than any man should be expected to cope with? Especially at six thirty and after less than four hours sleep. 'I can't stop, Ma. Sergeant Llewellyn will be picking me up any minute.'

'I won't keep you then, son, but I didn't know who else to turn to and what with the wedding and all...'

Rafferty frowned. News of the murder had already taken their toll on his hung-over wits, but the word "wedding" on his Ma's tongue was even more worrying and he struggled to get his brain into gear. 'What wedding?'

'I know Jack's only a distant cousin,' she remarked briskly, 'but surely you haven't forgotten that he's over from Dublin to marry my niece, Deirdre?'

*That* wedding. How could he have forgotten that *Jailhouse Jack*, the world's most incompetent criminal was preparing to plight his troth and pass his genes on to the next generation? What a wonderful addition to a policeman's close family the bridegroom would be. Thank God the happy couple would be going back to Ireland straight after the wedding and surely even Jack could stay out of trouble for the few weeks he'd be—

'He's in a spot of bother, Joseph.' After shattering his hopes, his mother didn't pause for either of them to catch their breath, but went on to explain that his troublesome cousin was being held at the Harcombe nick on suspicion of lifting a lorry load of whisky. 'I know what you're going to say,' she continued before he could get a word in, 'but this time I'm convinced he didn't do it.'

That would be a first, Rafferty concluded cynically, thankful that between them, the Irish Sea and a three times removed cousinship, usually kept Jack from embarrassing him.

'It would be a shame if he got put away right before the wedding. Can you go and see him and sort it out, son? I wouldn't ask, only I've had Deirdre here half the night crying her eyes out. She's scared she'll have to cancel the wedding.'

Rafferty snorted. Wasn't a murder enough, he wondered, without being expected to sort out Jack's little problem? Especially as he knew that as soon as he set foot in the Harcombe nick and revealed his mission of mercy, the shit would hit the fan.

His family was the limit, especially as some of them were of the opinion that if they *must* have a copper in the family, he might at least have the decency to be a *bent* one.

He consoled himself with the thought that he hadn't made a firm date with the looming fates. Jack could cool his heels for a bit. After all, he now remembered, the wedding was still two weeks off. He had plenty of time.

'It's not everyone that avoids matrimony like you, Joseph,' his mother told him tartly.

Rafferty broke in quickly before she got into her stride. The hoped-for remarriage of her braw boy was ever close to his mother's heart. 'Now Ma,' he warned. 'Don't go getting any ideas. I'm perfectly happy as I am.'

She treated this statement with withering contempt. 'Don't talk so foolish. How can a man on his own be happy? No, what you need is a wife. Your Uncle Pat's girl, Maureen, for instance. She'd be a fine catch for any man. I only want to see you settled.' Cunningly, she injected a quavering note of pathos into her voice. 'I'd like grandchildren before I die.'

'You've got eleven grandchildren already, Ma, and another on the way,' he reminded her. 'How many more do you want?'

'I may have a dozen,' she retorted briskly, imminent death evidently forgotten. 'But they're none of them Raffertys; they're all your sisters' children. I want one or two from my eldest son, my greatest pride. How else can the name get carried on?'

'I'm sure the fifty odd Raffertys in the phone book will do their best to continue the line,' he observed. 'Why don't you call and spur them on a little?' And leave him alone.

He glanced out of the window of his Essex flat and shivered. The day was bleak, the mist off the North Sea was thick and he could barely see the shoreline. Unfortunately, he had no trouble making out the thinly-handsome outline of his sergeant's face as he turned the car on to the forecourt. Llewellyn consulted his watch, and then gazed up at Rafferty's window with a suffering-bravely-borne expression.

Rafferty scowled. It was going to be one of those days. He felt it in his bones. 'I really must be off,' he told her firmly. 'Llewellyn's here.' He paused, wishing he didn't have to tell her, but he'd never hear the end of it if she had to find out from the papers. Taking a deep breath, he told her quickly, 'There's been a murder and—'

'A murder!'

'Mmm.' His attempt at calm nonchalance was singularly unsuccessful, and he went on briskly, 'Rather a nasty one. A young girl.' According to the desk sergeant, the girl had been brutally battered, her face left in such a state that it would have looked more at home on a butcher's slab. 'She was found at that private psychiatric hospital at Elmhurst and—'

'A loony bin?' His Ma's gasp of horror echoed down the line. 'It'll be one of them dangerous cyclepaths escaped. They're always doing it. The people in charge of these places should be locked up. You stay well away, son,' she advised firmly. 'Let that superintendent sort it out.'

'I *am* a policeman, Ma. And I'll be in charge of this one. They just promoted me, remember?' Still smarting from his superior sergeant's last correction of his own imperfect use of the English language, Rafferty said, 'And it's *psychopath*, not cyclepath. Not that he necessarily *is* one,' he hastily added. 'Besides, just because the girl was found in a psychiatric hospital, doesn't mean one of the patients did it, you know.'

'Doesn't mean to say they didn't, either,' she retorted. 'Very sly some of them. And they expect you to catch him?' She tutted worriedly. 'You watch your step my lad.'

He intended to. 'I've got to go.' No doubt the rest of the team would already be there working hard and calling him rude names in his absence. 'About Jack, Ma, stop worrying. I'll see to it.' He didn't have much choice.

To his relief, she kept any further anxieties to herself. 'Thanks son.' Now pride edged some of the worry out of her voice. 'I'll tell Deirdre that "My son, The Police Inspector's got it in hand, and Jack's as good as free".'

Rafferty wished he shared his Ma's confidence that springing the prospective bridegroom would be as easy as catching him usually was, but he made no comment.

'Well, I won't make you late for your murder. Look after yourself, Joseph, and don't take any nonsense from any of them high and mighty doctors at that hospital. Arrest the lot of them if you have to.'

'I'll bear it in mind, Ma,' he told her dryly. 'Good-bye.'

The constable beckoned the car forward and as the heavy hospital gates thudded together behind them, Llewellyn's dark eyes took on a mystic light as he remarked ominously, 'There'll be trouble over this one. Mark my words.'

Having delivered this cheering prognostication, he said no more and Rafferty, determined that the Welshman's black prophecy wouldn't undermine his confidence, did his best to ignore him.

He was helped in this by his first sight of the house. He came from a long line of builders and house renovators, and its classical Georgian elegance—which the well-tended grounds framed so perfectly—brought Rafferty a few precious moments of delight in a day unlikely to contain many pleasures. The handsome, seven-bay house was built of pale Caen stone, a popular import in such a stone-impoverished part of the country. The projecting central section was crowned by a graceful pediment and the ground floor, raised above the semi-basement, was reached by stone steps. Slender pillars flanked the canopied front door and they were flanked in turn by single windows with two more on either side of the recessed sections of the house. Perfection.

Just then, the sun came out from behind the early morning cloud, and he stared, as all thirteen of the large sash windows seemed to wink at him, like all-seeing eyes, as though mocking his ability to discover what they had witnessed in the night; a sight undoubtedly shared by the secretive, half-closed dormer eyes of the attic floor. The optical illusion fanned the flames of the superstition that Llewellyn had already successfully kindled and as they passed the house, he switched his gaze determinedly ahead of him as his Welsh prophet of doom drew up behind the earlier arrivals.

'Dr. Dally's here,' Llewellyn remarked unnecessarily with a sidelong glance at Rafferty. 'He must be nearly finished by now.'

'We all know quick and speedy doesn't always win the race, Sergeant,' Rafferty retorted, stung by the dig. 'Not that Sam Dally's either when it comes to letting us have some results.' Not for the first, nor the last time that day, he reflected that it was a pity the girl had chosen a mental hospital in which to get herself murdered; on his first serious case since his promotion too. Now he wondered uneasily if an unpropitious fate was about to enjoy some fun and games at his expense. It wouldn't be the first time.

As they walked round the shrouding screen, Dr. Dally raised a shaggy grey eyebrow teasingly. 'Late again, Rafferty?'

Dally's jocular greeting merely earned a scowl, but as Rafferty got his first view of the corpse, he had to swallow hard, again regretting his previous night's alcohol intake.



The girl was lying on her back and someone had certainly made mincemeat of her. What might once have been a pretty face was now a soggy mess—her teeth were gone, her eyes were gone, her nose was gone—all smashed to a bloody pulp. It looked as if someone had taken a sledge-hammer to her. 'The press will have a field day with this one,' he remarked grimly.

Considering it was April, the previous night had been quite balmy, yet surely he was only imagining the sickly scent of corruption? Behind him, Llewellyn remarked in funereal tones, "'So will we all decay. The past is the only dead thing that smells sweet.'"

Rafferty gave him a jaundiced look. 'Thank you, Dylan Thomas.'

'Edward Thomas, actually, sir,' Llewellyn corrected and launched into a mini lecture, apparently believing that it was his duty to lighten the darkness of his boss's ignorance. 'Killed in action in World War One. Then there's R.S. Thomas, the Welsh vicar. He—'

'All right, all right,' Rafferty broke in, irritated as usual by Llewellyn's display of erudition; sure he did it out of some deep, mischievous desire to get under his skin. 'This is neither the time nor the place to set about completing my education, Sergeant. I'll thank you to remember that.'

His puce complexion regained some of its usually fresh colour as he put Llewellyn in his place, but it drained away again as he gazed at the dead girl. Poor bitch, he thought. Whoever, whatever she was, she surely hadn't deserved such an end. Curiously, the naked body was unmarked and as his eyes travelled over the slim cadaver, he wondered at the unfathomable ways of women. Why would a natural blonde dye her hair black?

'The first priority is going to be to find out who she was,' he remarked to Llewellyn. 'Tell Fraser I want her prints run through the computer yesterday.' He hoped to God they were on file. If they weren't, it could be a nightmare to attempt to identify her. He turned to the doctor. 'What can you tell me, Sam?'

'Little enough, Rafferty, little enough. Sam's plump body rocked back on its heels and, behind his spectacles, his eyes lit up with relish as he watched Rafferty's face. 'You look a bit green, my boy.' He dug his hand in his back pocket and pulled out a small silver flask. 'Have a medicinal nip. Doctor's orders,' he added firmly as Rafferty hesitated.

Forgetting his scruples, Rafferty reached gratefully for his medicine and took a swig. 'Should be on prescription.' He grinned as the alcohol hit the spot. 'Irish?'

Sam Dally snorted. 'It's only the best that the Highlands can offer. I can see it's wasted on you.' Taking the flask back, he had a quick nip himself. 'Ah. That's better. Nothing like a hair of the dog for setting a man to rights. And I should know.'

Rafferty brightened, glad to know he had company in his suffering. Especially when that company was in the rotund shape of the tonic toting Dally. 'I gather you had a heavy night?'

Sam nodded. 'Doctors' do at The George,' he explained. 'Annual event. Wouldn't miss it. Our erstwhile chairman's wife, Lady Evelyn Melville-Briggs organises it so it couldn't fail to go like clockwork. Shame she didn't seem to enjoy it. Not surprising she was so quiet, of course. Her old man was in a towering rage when they arrived.' He snorted. 'Some hoo-ha about the door-man. I didn't stop to listen to it.' He put the flask back in his pocket and became briskly professional. 'Been dead at least seven hours. Rigor mortis has started to set in around the head and neck. The blow to the back of the head is probably what killed her.'

Rafferty raised his eyebrows. He could have come to that conclusion for himself. Even with the body lying on its back, he could see the skull was caved in, making an amorphous mess of bone and brain. 'Could a woman have done it, do you think?'

Sam nodded. 'Wouldn't need as much strength as you'd think; only stealth to creep up on her, and then determination to keep whacking, like Lizzie Borden.'

Rafferty raised his gaze from the gory horror on the ground. At the edge of the trees, he caught sight of a well-dressed man, pacing with barely contained impatience. He nodded in his direction. 'Who's that?'

Sam followed the direction of Rafferty's gaze, and, in an echo of Llewellyn, he remarked, 'That's Trouble, Rafferty. Trouble with a capital T.' Rubbing his hands together with childish glee, he continued. 'That's the owner. Consultant Psychiatrist Dr. Anthony Melville-Briggs. But you'll find plain "Sir" will do. Husband to the Lady Evelyn etc etc. I wouldn't like to be in your shoes when he finds out a lowly inspector's in charge of the case.' He gave Rafferty a sly look. 'Perhaps you should listen to your Mammy and get married again. Old Tony certainly shows what marriage can do for a man.'

Rafferty's lip curled. Sam Dally, compassionate doctor of medicine, could always be relied upon to hit a man below the belt. One marriage had been enough; his relief that Angie's death had brought an end to their mutual unhappiness still caused him guilt. In spite of his mother's continued attempts to persuade, push and cajole him into matrimony a

second time, Rafferty resisted. Still, he mused, at least it gave her less time for her other little hobby, and unlike that, her matchmaking didn't carry with it the risk of a jail sentence for the pair of them. 'Got any more unwanted advice?'

Sam shook his head. 'Why cast more pearls before swine, laddie?' he asked sweetly. He glanced again at Melville-Briggs and a beatific smile lit up his face as he set about removing the glow of the restorative whisky. 'I was at medical school with him and he barely had a bean before he married Lady Evelyn. You could see he was determined to go places even in those days.' Sam Dally took off his glasses and gave them a brisk polish before continuing. 'Well in with the Chief Constable, so I understand. Me, I don't mix in such exalted circles.'

The last remnants of Rafferty's good-humour vanished as he studied the Chief Constable's best friend. Dr. Melville-Briggs had that look of sleek self-satisfaction that only a man with the good fortune to marry money acquires. He was in his early fifties, Rafferty guessed, but had kept himself in shape. With his pure white hair swept dramatically back from his high forehead, he could have been taken for a Shakespearean actor awaiting the plaudits of the crowd after a lunch-time performance in the park. Rafferty hoped he didn't intend to indulge in any histrionics this morning, but after what Sam had said, he wasn't optimistic. Dr. Melville-Briggs's cheeks wore an unlovely hectic flush probably caused by a combination of temper and shock and Rafferty came to the depressing conclusion that the doctor was taking the crime as some kind of personal affront. But then he was rich and successful and probably imagined that his select establishment would, by its very exclusivity, be shielded from the sordid world outside his gates.

Rafferty reflected that it must have come as an unpleasant surprise to find that his little kingdom wasn't quite as inviolate as he had imagined. Then he prepared to give Melville-Briggs his second surprise of the day.

## CHAPTER TWO

With Llewellyn dogging his heels, Rafferty made his way over to the doctor and introduced himself.

Bloodshot blue eyes surveyed him without enthusiasm. He got the impression that neither his shiny new rank, nor his shiny new suit cut much ice with the doctor.

'The constable on the gate said the CID was on their way.' A faint frown marred the smooth perfection of Melville-Briggs's brow. 'I take it the Chief Inspector will be along shortly?'

Although the doctor's voice was as fruity as a greengrocer's stall and polished to an almost glossy perfection, stress had brought out a hint of his Midlands origin and Rafferty guessed unhappily that the Brummie-boy made good would expect the very best and cut up rough when he didn't get it. He broke the news to him gently. 'I'm afraid the Chief Inspector won't be coming, Sir. We're a bit short-staffed at the moment.'

'I think you'll find you're mistaken about that, Rafferty.' A professional smile briefly dazzled. 'Obviously the station doesn't know who I am. The Chief Constable's a personal friend of mine and once I've telephoned him, he'll be glad to oblige me.'

Presumably satisfied that Rafferty now realised his star quality, Melville-Briggs patted him on the back in a consoling manner as he dismissed his skills. 'Don't take it personally, Inspector. But this is a very select establishment. A certain diplomacy is called for if my patients aren't to be upset. I'm sure you understand?'

Oh yes, he understood all right, Rafferty reflected grimly. What it didn't need, Melville-Briggs was implying, was some heavy-footed oaf like himself. But it was very tactfully put. He hoped the doctor would be as sensitive to his feelings in a minute or two.

'There's been no mistake, Sir. There really is no-one else available. And the Chief Constable's on holiday. Trekking in the Himalayas, I believe,' he added faintly.

'Trekking in the Himala—?' Melville-Briggs's lips pursed, but they opened sufficiently to murmur, 'I see,' in clipped tones, as he gave Rafferty's off-the-rack suit a swift, assessing appraisal.

Perhaps he liked the style, Rafferty mused, but somehow, he didn't think so.

The doctor concealed his disappointment well; Rafferty had to give him that. Melville-Briggs fingered his jaw thoughtfully and smiled again; a smile of singular charm that immediately put Rafferty on his guard.

'Now. How can I put this? It's a trifle delicate, and I wouldn't want you to think me insensitive, but it is important that this distressing matter is cleared up as quickly as possible. The publicity...' He winced as if in genuine pain, before he put his hand inside his beautifully cut pearl-grey suit, and murmured, 'Perhaps a donation to the Police Benevolent Fund will ease things along a little, hmm?'

Although the doctor's attempted bribery was discreet, Rafferty was under no illusion that bribery was what it amounted to. What did the man expect him to do? Fit up a likely criminal with the murder? Or did he imagine the crime could be swept under the carpet like last week's dust and conveniently forgotten?

Rafferty gave a grim little smile and wished he could forget the doctor's high-placed friend. 'The police are always grateful for such generosity, but perhaps it would be best if you sent a cheque direct to the Fund? We don't want anyone getting the wrong idea, do we, Sir?'

The doctor withdrew his hand from his pocket. 'Of course not,' he agreed smoothly. He was a cool customer, all right, thought Rafferty.

'Excellent idea. I can't imagine why I didn't think of it.'

Balked of an early reduction in the crime statistics, Melville-Briggs's voice lost a little of its silken charm. 'You know, Rafferty, I've been thinking and I'm convinced that there was an ulterior motive for this crime. Someone wants to ruin my reputation and that of my hospital. I haven't any evidence, of course,' he admitted as Rafferty stared at him, 'but a man in my position makes enemies and why else would anyone dump a corpse here? It's obvious when you think about it.'

Rafferty blinked. It wasn't obvious to him. 'Was there any particular reason for you to think that, Sir?' he asked guardedly.

'Ask yourself, who has most to lose by this murder? I have, of course,' he answered his own rhetorical question. 'This crime was intended to cause me maximum loss, inconvenience and embarrassment.'

Rafferty was tempted to remark that the victim had suffered a greater loss. 'I'll do my best to minimise your inconvenience, Sir,' he promised dryly. 'Now, have you any idea who the dead girl might be?'

Melville-Briggs shook his head. 'None.'

'Are any of your staff missing, for instance?'

'No. I've already checked that. And the current patients are all accounted for.' He frowned. 'It's rather a mystery who she could be, as visitors can't gain access to the grounds without signing in at the lodge—fire regulations, you know.'

'Mmm.' Rafferty had hoped the girl's identity would be easily established, but now that hope vanished, he became brisk. 'We'll need an official statement from everyone here, Sir, and as you're anxious for us to get this crime solved speedily, perhaps I can ask you to start the ball rolling?'

'Certainly. You'll find my statement's very straightforward. If you'd like to take this down, Sergeant?' Llewellyn whipped out his notebook. 'Between the hours of 8.00 p.m. and 2.00 a.m. on 11/12 April, I was at a medical dinner at The George in Hamborne. No doubt the door-man will remember us arriving.'

Who did he think he was? God or visiting royalty?

'I was accompanied by my wife, Lady Evelyn, and I didn't leave the hotel during the entire time. If your sergeant would like to get that typed up, I'll sign it.'

'Certainly Sir,' Rafferty agreed. 'We'll need to see your wife, of course. Just a formality,' he added diplomatically as the doctor frowned. 'Will it be convenient if I call at your home at, say, 5.00 o'clock this afternoon?'

'I'm afraid you'll have to make your own arrangements with my wife, Rafferty. I shall be in the flat here this evening.' He fixed Rafferty with a firm eye. 'I do hope you'll make every effort to catch the perpetrator. If the case lingers on it could be – unpleasant.'

He didn't specify for whom – he didn't need to as the question that followed reminded Rafferty where any retribution would fall.

'When's the Chief Constable due back, by the way?'

'Not for another fortnight, Sir.' Pride made him briefly optimistic. 'But I'm sure we'll have this case wrapped up before he returns from leave.' As soon as the words were out of his mouth he regretted them, but of course the cavalry of common-sense arrived too late to

do any good and, with a sinking feeling, he hoped he'd be able to live up to his incautious boast.

'I'm glad to hear it, Rafferty.'

There was the faintest suggestion of respect in the doctor's eyes and it gave him confidence. Earlier he'd noticed a wooden door set in the wall a few yards from the body. It was locked, but its nearness to the corpse piqued his curiosity. 'Just as a matter of interest, Sir, who would have a key to that side-door in the perimeter wall?' The quick answer surprised him.

'Apart from myself, no-one.' Melville-Briggs looked uneasy at this admission and Rafferty wondered if he realised that, should his alibi not check out, possession of that particular key raised him to the unenviable status of chief suspect; if he did, he soon recovered. 'The staff all use the main gate. I insist upon them clocking in and out every day.'

You would, thought Rafferty, still smarting from the doctor's earlier dismissal of his detecting abilities. He was the type who would be sure to extract his pound of flesh from the wage-slaves.

'All the keys are kept at the lodge,' the doctor went on, 'and they must sign for them, at the end of the shift they hand them back to the lodge-porter. The key to the side-gate isn't on the general rings.'

Once again, there was that faint unease. Rafferty made no comment. He would allow Melville-Briggs's well-polished skin to sweat a little. It would do him good. If anyone else *did* have a key to that door, the gate-porter would be able to tell them.

'As I said, I'll need to speak to the staff and patients as well, Sir. Could a room could be put at my disposal?'

'I'll speak to my secretary,' Melville-Briggs agreed briefly. 'I'm sure we'll be able to come up with something suitable.' He fixed Rafferty with a determined eye, and added, 'though I must insist that my patients are disturbed as little as possible. Frankly, I fail to see any reason to question them at all.'

Rafferty thought it likely that Melville-Briggs's concern was less for his highly-strung patients and more for the possible loss of revenue from his patients' wealthy and easily-alarmed relatives. 'I'm afraid it is necessary, sir.' His voice was firm. 'This was a particularly brutal murder, and before I charge anyone I need to be sure we have a water-tight case. The patients may have seen something that would put the identity of the murderer beyond

doubt. Perhaps one of them—' Rafferty broke off abruptly as he realised that the suggestion that one of the doctor's precious patients might even have done the deed was unlikely to go down well.

Melville-Briggs's small eyes narrowed as though he had followed the train of Rafferty's thoughts. 'Assuming the girl died sometime last night, they'd all have been in bed and sedated, with nurses in constant attendance,' Melville-Briggs's voice was sharp. 'Anyway, the patients sleep in the bedroom block and their windows overlook the rose-garden, not the gate.'

Rafferty persisted. 'Even so, we still need to take their statements and eliminate them from our enquiries, Sir. They may have seen someone suspicious hanging about earlier yesterday.'

Melville-Briggs gave in ungraciously. 'Oh, very well.'

'We'll be very discreet, Sir,' Rafferty soothed.

Melville-Briggs didn't look convinced and, after a pained glance at Rafferty's unruly red hair and loud pink tie, he closed his eyes briefly. 'Now, if you'll excuse me, I must get back to my patients.'

Rafferty wasn't sure if he'd imagined the, 'while I've still got some left,' tagged on to the end of the doctor's reply. With a curt nod, Melville-Briggs made for the house.

Rafferty sighed. Just his luck to get landed with a murder in a nut-house; such cases always caused unpleasant complications—a nice simple mass murder would be less troublesome. Melville-Briggs was going to be a problem, he could sense it. Just because, so far, he'd been reasonably accommodating, didn't mean it would last. 'Dally was right,' he remarked gloomily to Llewellyn, as he watched the doctor's retreating back. He even walked rich. 'Gentleman Jim's going to be trouble. Did you notice the charm beginning to wear thin?'

'He just needs a little careful handling, Sir,' remarked Llewellyn smoothly. 'As the Bible says, "A soft answer turneth away wrath,"' adding, as Rafferty stared at him, momentarily speechless, 'Proverbs 15 verse—'

'Yes, all right!' Rafferty interrupted, not altogether surprised to discover that Llewellyn had a Machiavellian side to his nature. 'I had enough of bible-thumpers at school without you starting. Anyway,' he added flatly, 'I'm not here to massage Melville-Briggs's inflated ego.' But he *was* a friend of the CC, he reminded himself unhappily. Perhaps



Llewellyn had a point, though he didn't intend to give his sergeant the satisfaction of knowing he was right. He was unbearable enough as it was. 'So, you catch more flies with honey than you do with vinegar,' he remarked sardonically. 'I'll bear it in mind.' But he was only too conscious that he'd have to do more than that. It went against the grain, but he knew if he didn't want him to start a loud and angry buzzing, Melville-Briggs was one ugly bluebottle he would be wise to coat in as much honey as he could muster.

Dr. Dally had finished his examination and the body was ready to be taken to the mortuary. Rafferty stood and watched as the shrouded corpse was placed in the back of the ambulance. So lost was he in silent, brooding contemplation, that he jumped a foot in the air, as from behind him, there came a cackle of maniacal laughter. He turned and found himself eyeball to eyeball with a man in pyjamas, presumably one of Dr. Melville-Briggs's precious patients. The man's pupils were wildly dilated and his curly dark hair and long beard gave him a biblical appearance, which his first words did nothing to contradict.

'So the whore has gone, then?'

Rafferty nodded, all senses suddenly alert. 'Did you know her?' The idiocy of his question was apparent as soon as the words were spoken. Melville-Briggs had probably been correct when he'd said the patients would have been quiet and sedated at the time of the murder. And if that was so, how could this one even guess at her identity, especially as her features had been rendered unrecognisable, even by her own mother?

The man didn't seem to think his question in any way odd. 'Of course I knew her. Doesn't every man recognise that foul, naked wanton, the Whore of Babylon?' As the ambulance came round the far side of the house and continued up the drive, he raised a wiry, pyjama-clad arm and pointed. 'Jezebel has gone now. The devil will find a place for her in hell. So shall end all fornicators.' He lowered his condemning arm, and began to pound his bunched-up fist into the palm of his other hand.

Rafferty noticed that the man's skin was stained with a red substance that looked very like blood. With a little chill, he wondered whether Melville-Briggs might have been wrong. Was it possible this poor, sick creature had somehow evaded the nursing staff and gained entrance to the grounds?

His confidence plummeted. Having an outsider commit the murder would be awful enough, from the doctor's point of view, but to have one of his patients proved the guilty

## Thank You for previewing this eBook

You can read the full version of this eBook in different formats:

- HTML (Free /Available to everyone)
- PDF / TXT (Available to V.I.P. members. Free Standard members can access up to 5 PDF/TXT eBooks per month each month)
- Epub & Mobipocket (Exclusive to V.I.P. members)

To download this full book, simply select the format you desire below

